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ABSTRACT

In Iowa in the 1980s, dreams of prosperity were suddenly replaced by economic nightmares as plummeting land values generated economic decline and dislocation in rural communities and individual lives. This book examines the experience of over 400 Iowa families who lived through the Great Farm Crisis and now face an uncertain future. Interviewed as part of the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP), these families live on farms or in small rural communities that are financially dependent on a volatile agricultural economy. In 1989, all families included a seventh-grade adolescent and a sibling within 4 years of age. This family configuration provided the basis for assessing the impact of economic hardship on marital, parent-child, and sibling relationships. Chapters of the book are separately authored by members of the IYFP research team, but each evaluates dimensions of a specific model of family economic stress. As proposed in the model, financial hardship directly increased risk for emotional problems, especially among parents. Personal unhappiness and irritability translated into hostile and angry behaviors with other family members, including children, and threatened the perceived quality of family relationships for all family members. Ultimately, family conflict and turmoil increased the risk of adjustment problems in the development of children and adolescents. Fortunately, strengths of family members and their relationships within and outside the nuclear family served to attenuate these difficulties. Chapters cover the IYFP; methodology; rural economic and social trends; families under economic pressure; survival, loss, and adaptation among farm families; children's and adolescents' role in the household economy; family origins of personal and social well-being; psychological consequences of economic hardship; marital relations; harsh parenting; resilient and vulnerable adolescents; sibling relations; and summary and recommendations. Authors are Rand D. Conger; Glen H. Elder, Jr.; Frederick O. Lorenz; Janet N. Melby; Paul Lasley; Elizabeth B. Robertson; Monika Ardelt; E. Michael Foster; Les B. Whitbeck; Ronald L. Simons; Shirley Huck; Ruth Montague; Xiao-Jia Ge; Chyi-In Wu; and

Katherine J. Conger. Appendix includes scales for observer rating of family interactions. Bibliography contains over 250 references. Subject and author index included. (SV)

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